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ABSTRACT

This paper proceeds from the assumption that (1) thinking about values is necessary and critical for people interested in curriculum; (2) curriculum designs are value-oriented statements; (3) in approaching curriculum thinking frcm an interest in values, it is important to identify clearly the unit of interest and its relationship to other units of interest; (4) the focus and use of values thinking will be different from one unit of interest to another; and (5) that attempts at a productive dialogue, when primary interests are in different units, lead to hostility and confusion rather than to understanding and clarity. From these assumptions, the author draws four implications: (1) it is important to clearly identify ones unit of interest before entering into dialogues concerning values in curriculum, because the unit of interest will determine the focus of values-thinking; (2) values-thinking at the conceptual, transactional, and transformational levels is referenced by the mode of thought at the preceding level; (3) practice affects theory building through the interaction of the generative mode of the transformational level with the theoretical level; and (4) the proper focus of study for understanding the valuing process is the interaction between the transactional and transformaticnal levels. (Author)

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Modes of Values Thinking in Curriculum

-Alex Molnar-

This paper proceeds from four assumptions: 1) that thinking about values is necessary and critical for people interested in curriculum; 2) That curriculum designs are value-oriented statements; 3) That in approaching curriculum thinking from an interest in values, it is important to identify clearly the unit of interest and its relationship to other units of interest; 4) That the focus and use of values thinking will be different from one unit of interest to another and, that attempts at a productive dialogue when primary interests are in different units leads to hostility and confusion rather than understanding and clarity.

There are at least four interactive units of interest which are useful in considering the implications of values in curriculum thinking: 1) theoretical, 2) conceptual, 3) transactional, and 4) transformational.

THEORETICAL

At the theoretical level, thinking about values is guided by a concern with first principles. Value concerns at this level are actually concerns with meta-values in the various domains of value; i.e., those ethical, aesthetic, religious, and other truths accepted by the theorizer which can be reduced no further within the context of a coherent philosophy. The derivation of these meta-values has been and remains a matter of intense concern to curriculum theorists. They represent the starting point from which values and value thinking at all other levels derive and are held to be consistent or inconsistent in comparison. Meta-values are non-operational values, not in the sense that they cannot find concrete representation in the actions of men, but rather that they are not thought of as directly open to empirical validation. Their usefulness to the theorist is in the modes of thought they facilitate rather than the specific action they prescribe or the operational principles which may be derived from them.

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CONCEPTUAL

At the conceptual level, thinking about values is guided by a concern for derivational principles and evaluative criteria based on both observable phenomena and meta-values. In a sentence, values-thinking at this level wrestles with how to give an accepted truth the shape and form of goals within a curriculum design. There are large numbers of potential goals. Value orientation in this mode of thought requires that the curriculum designer, unlike the theorizer, develop a consistent framework, not for thinking about or identifying general truths, but for consistently deriving from those truths action patterns which may be said to potentiate them. If we follow Herrick, for example, it is at this level that we both consider the three referents for curriculum decision-making he has identified (people/learners, subject matter, or social phenomena) and make a value choice of the one which will become primary in the elaboration of our curriculum design. The choice itself will be determined by which of the three referents and what order of priority both 1) consistently represent the accepted truth and 2) offer the greatest opportunity to potentiate that truth in practice (which is as yet non-existent). The curriculum designer in thinking about values makes decisions which in his mind reflect an accepted truth. However, thinking about values at this level of discourse is mediated by a need to operationalize values in practice. Value cleavages, which are sharp theoretically, begin to blur at the conceptual level when the curriculum designer must select from a number of competing goals. The usefulness of thinking about values for the curriculum designer is that it allows him to: 1) elaborate criteria for decision making, 2) establish goals for practice, and 3) provide him with a frame of reference from which to both observe and analyze practice.

TRANSACTIONAL

Thinking about values at the transactional level is directed by an interest in 1) the transactions between content, process, the learner, and potential outcomes and 2) the relationship of those transactions to the curriculum design as they reflect upon the validity of the goals established by the design. Thinking about values at the transactional level requires that a coherent intellectual (though not necessarily causal) relationship be drawn between design goals and classroom transactions; i.e., are the design values evident in the pattern of classroom transactions? At this level of thinking, learning outcomes exist only as potentials and therefore cannot be used as referents for assessing the adequacy of the design. The value interest at this level is whether or not classroom transactions 1) themselves reflect design values, and 2) generate the potential for the acquisition of those values by the participants. Analysis at the transactional level uses values-thinking to facilitate judgments about the curriculum design in four dimensions: 1) whether design goals ought to be maintained but classroom transactions changed; 2) whether design goals ought to be maintained and classroom transactions maintained; 3) whether design goals ought to be changed and classroom transactions maintained; and 4) whether design goals ought to be changed and classroom transactions changed.

It is at the transactional level that values-thinking shifts in focus from the identification (theoretical) and logical relationing of (theoretical and conceptual) value referents to an interest in the value implications of practice as embodied in the transactions suggested by the curriculum design.

TRANSFORMATIONAL

Thinking of values at the transformational level is guided by an interest in outcomes. Transformational analysis is multi-dimensional in that it seeks to identify both the values present in practice, the values acquired by the participants in practice, and the valuing process engendered by practice. At the theoretical and conceptual levels, values-thinking is in large part definitional, i.e., what values are accepted truths and how can these truths be forged into a design. At the transactional level, values-thinking, though focused on transactions is referenced heavily by pre-existing value categories. At the transactional level, values-thinking is focused on the objective verification of outcomes which can be judged adequate in terms of the values designed into the curriculum environment. It is also focused on the self-validated learning of the participants in the process of valuing, which it may or may not be possible to assess by pre-existing categories. It is at the transformational level that the external values embodied in classroom transactions share the focus of values thinking with the internal subjective values of the transactional participants. Of equal interest at this level are the valuing outcomes, i.e., the transformations which occur when objective (external) and subjective (internal) realities meet, and the implications of the transformations to the curricular design.

Values thinking at the transformational level directs analysis in three modes: 1) evaluative, 2) critical, and 3) generative.

EVALUATIVE

In the evaluative mode observable behaviors are assessed as both adequate and valuable when held against the objectified values represented in the curriculum design. In the evaluative mode, participants are valued in reference to goal compliance.

CRITICAL

In the critical mode value is determined when the objectified values of the curriculum design as embodied in classroom transactions are held against the multiple outcomes of those transactions. This mode is necessarily more fluid than the evaluative mode because participant knowledge outcomes may not objectively support design goals. At the same time they may reflect theoretical values in unplanned ways or may represent values articulated neither theoretically nor conceptually. To effectively entertain these possibilities requires an ability to transcend judgments of worth referenced in theoretical and design values as defined by classroom transactions. Values thinking in the critical mode thus reverses the interest of the evaluative mode because design values are held to be valuable or not in terms of the subjective knowing of participants in the transaction.

GENERATIVE

In the generative mode value is assessed according to whether or not heretofore non-existant realities are created. That is, do objective and subjective knowledge in the process of interacting create separate realities within which value referents may be organized in unanticipated and unexpected ways? Such new realities provide the basis for making technical adjustments in design and transactional variables. Such adjustments may also be suggested by values-thinking in the evaluative and critical modes. However, their real promise in the generative mode is in the insight they may provide into value truths at the theoretical level. It is in the generative mode of thinking at the transformational level that theory and practice most fundamentally interact, because it is here that values-thinking returns full course from action prescription and empirical validation to the facilitation of new modes of thought.

Four implications are suggested by the ideas put forward in this paper:

1) It is important to clearly identify ones unit of interest before entering into dialogues concerning values in curriculum because the unit of interest will determine the focus of values-thinking.

2) Values-thinking at the conceptual, transactional, and transformational levels is referenced by the mode of thought at the preceeding level.

3) Practice affects theory building through the interaction of the generative mode of the transformational level with the theoretic level.

4) The proper focus of study for understanding the valuing process is the interaction between the transactional and transformational levels.

DIAGRAM 1

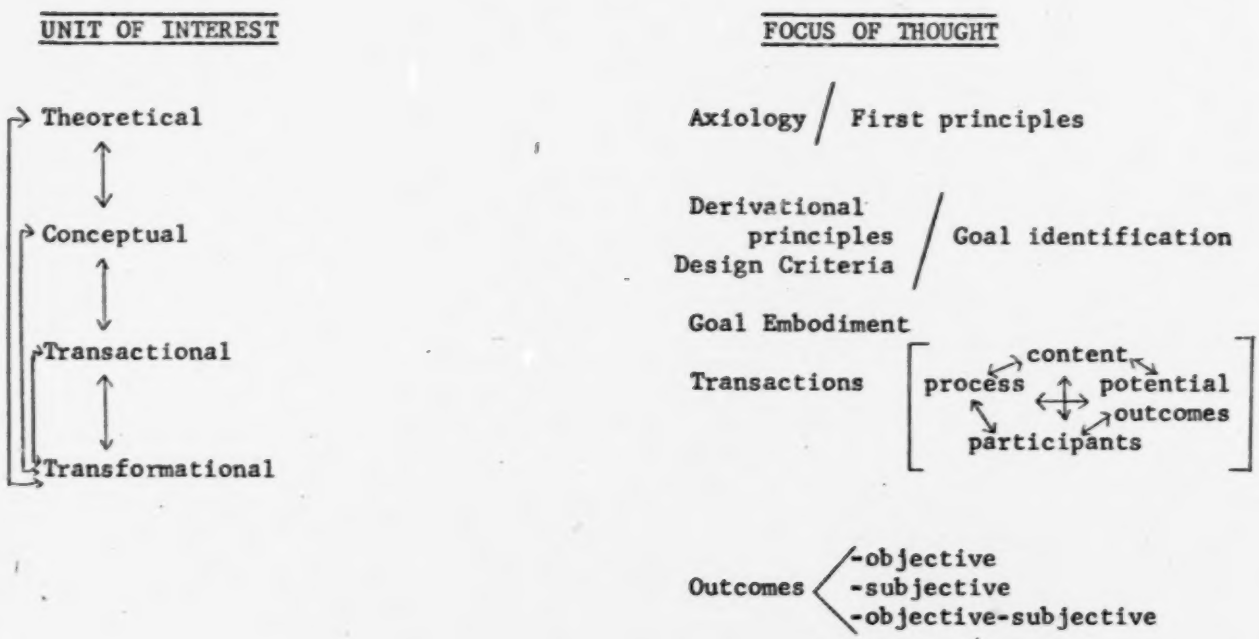
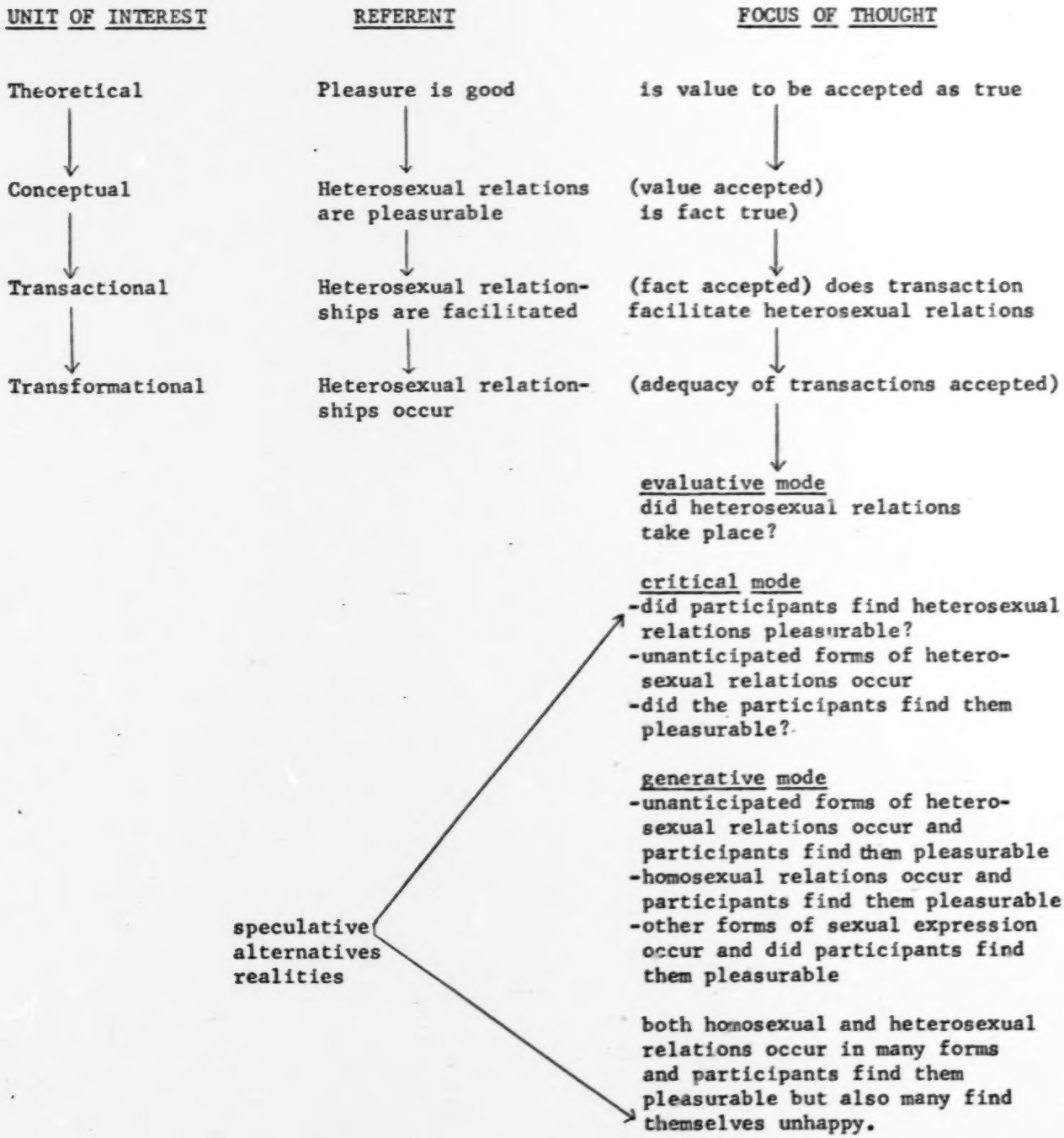

UNIT OF INTEREST
Theoretical
Conceptual
Transactional
Transformational
FOCUS OF THOUGHT
Axiology / First principles
Derivational principles / Goal identification
Design Criteria
Goal Embodiment
Transactions
content
process
potential
outcomes
participants
Outcomes
-objective
-subjective
-objective-subjective

DIAGRAM 2

How the focus of values thinking shifts from unit of interest to unit of interest


UNIT OF INTEREST
REFERENT
FOCUS OF THOUGHT
Theoretical
Pleasure is good
is value to be accepted as true
Conceptual
Heterosexual relations are pleasurable
(value accepted) is fact true)
Transactional
Heterosexual relationships are facilitated
(fact accepted) does transaction facilitate heterosexual relations
Transformational
Heterosexual relationships occur
(adequacy of transactions accepted)
evaluative mode
did heterosexual relations take place?
critical mode
-did participants find heterosexual relations pleasurable?
-unanticipated forms of heterosexual relations occur
-did the participants find them pleasurable?
generative mode
-unanticipated forms of heterosexual relations occur and participants find them pleasurable
-homosexual relations occur and participants find them pleasurable
-other forms of sexual expression occur and did participants find them pleasurable
speculative alternatives realities
both homosexual and heterosexual relations occur in many forms and participants find them pleasurable but also many find themselves unhappy.